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OECD/INES/NETWORK A

# REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

*Issue 11* *February 2000*

## *In This Issue*

The February 2000 newsletter focuses its main article on five international assessment activities currently "in the field"—PISA, TIMSS-R, ALL, Civics, and PIRLS. It will explore some of the similarities and differences among these assessments and will include information from countries that have shared their rationales for participating in these activities and their plans for disseminating results. It is hoped that this article will further the understanding of the types of data that will be available shortly for examining the skills and competencies of the citizens of OECD countries.

Also included in this issue is a country highlight focusing on one of Network A's newest members, Australia. Read about the Australian education system and how student assessment is conducted in a federal system. As usual, the newsletter also provides updates on Networks A, B, and C, and the BPC, as well as a brief review of assessment activities occurring in member countries between July and December 1999.

As always, we thank all those who contributed to the newsletter. Special thanks to Wendy Whitham and her colleagues from Australia for authoring the article on the Australian education system and to Allan Nordin of Sweden and Jaap Scheerens of the Netherlands and their respective staff for updates from around the INES Project. We hope you enjoy this latest newsletter!

## *International Assessments*

### *A Comparative Perspective*

Over the past years, the education community has seen an increase in interest in information on student outcomes. Policy makers and researchers in many countries want to know if their students and citizens have the knowledge and skills to compete effectively in a global society. Consequently, there has been an increase in activity in the field of international assessment—in the number of programs being implemented, in the number of countries participating in these assessments, and in the domains and populations they intend to measure. As such, over the next 2 to 3 years, we will see the results of no less than 5 major international assessments. In this context, and in response to discussions occurring at the international level, we thought it would be useful to provide an overview of these activities—particularly, of the ways in which they are similar and the ways in which they differ in order that we have a sense of the unique and important contributions each can make and how results can be interpreted both together and separately to further understanding of learning outcomes.

The assessments profiled in this article are the five major studies currently in the field:

- IEA Third International Mathematics and Science Study-Repeat (TIMSS-R),
- IEA Civic Education Study (CivEd),
- OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA),
- IEA Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), and
- Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) Study[1]

## *What are these studies measuring?*

Together, these assessment programs measure achievement and attitudes in a variety of domains—from the more traditional academic subjects, rooted in curricular subjects, to the less traditional areas, which may be acquired across a curriculum or outside school altogether. Furthermore, they measure skills and competencies from as young as 9 year-old students to the adult population, 16 to 65 years old, although most focus on lower and upper secondary populations. In sum,

- TIMSS-R measures the mathematics and science achievement of 13 year-old students. The mathematics assessment includes items on fractions, algebra, data representation, analysis, and measurement, among other curricular areas; and the science assessment includes items about earth science, life science, physics, scientific inquiry and other curricular areas.
- CivEd assesses 14 year-old students' factual knowledge in civics and their skills in using civics-related knowledge, as well as their attitudes towards civic institutions, issues, and actions.
- PISA assesses the reading, mathematics, and science literacy of 15 year-old students in terms of the important knowledge and skills needed for adult life, not just in terms of school curriculum. Emphasis is placed on the mastery of the process, understanding of concepts and the ability to function in various situations in each domain. Additionally, PISA 2000 options will measure cross-curricular competencies such as self-regulated learning and student's familiarity with technology, while plans for PISA 2003 options include measurement of problem solving.
- PIRLS measures reading literacy of 9 year-old students with a focus on both reading for literary experience and reading to acquire and use information. The assessment is geared to engage the full repertoire of reading skills and strategies including retrieving a focusing on specific ideas, making simple and complex inferences, and examining and evaluating text features.
- ALL measures prose and document literacy, numeracy, and analytic reasoning of individuals aged 16 to 65 years old, with an additional questionnaire on information and communication technology and development work in practical cognition (i.e., "common sense") and teamwork.

While at first glance it may be tempting to equate studies that focus on similar topics (e.g., mathematics), the respective assessment frameworks highlight the distinctions among them. For instance, TIMSS-R is a study that measures achievement in specific content areas that most students are exposed to by the age of 13, whereas PISA is a study that assesses the yield of the education system by assessing students in the use and application of mathematics concepts that are important for functioning in life. The numeracy scale in ALL shares a similar focus with PISA on the use and application of mathematics, although the concepts tested are different.

[1]This is the study previously known as the International Life Skills Study (ILSS).

On the other hand, though assessment frameworks differ from study to study, they often complement one another in some way. For example, PIRLS' reading literacy test is designed to complement the information about mathematics and science achievement collected in TIMSS (the study prior to TIMSS-R), which also assessed students in the fourth grade. Furthermore, PIRLS' results from 9 year-old students can provide context for understanding the results of PISA's reading literacy assessment of older students. In addition, it will be interesting to see what the relationship is between the assessment of problem solving skills in ALL and that planned for future cycles of PISA.

Finally, several studies share a focus on assessing cross-curricular competencies—skills and competencies that are not acquired through study of any one subject matter but which are important to functioning in life and society. For instance, both PISA and ALL include such components—the former is focusing in current or future cycles on self-regulated learning and information technology and the latter is conducting feasibility studies in practical cognition and teamwork and includes a questionnaire on information technology. However, it should be noted that these domains, in current plans, are measured through questionnaires or self-report instruments (rather than through achievement tests, such as with the cognitive items). With regard to information technology in PISA, it is hoped that in the future, assessments will be developed that will allow the testing of individuals' skills in using and applying information and communication technologies.

## *How are assessments administered and what are the key features?*

A paper and pencil method for survey administration is common to all five major assessments. However, for PIRLS, there are plans for computerized testing for a subset of students. For all surveys, both multiple choice and open-ended item formats are used.

To reduce the amount of testing time required of individual students, PISA, ALL, TIMSS-R, and PIRLS use a rotated booklet method for administration. That is, different versions of the test are given to different groups of students, ensuring that, overall, a sufficient number of students answer each item to allow analysis of data. For example, for PISA, each student will complete the assessment and questionnaires in two hours, although the amount of total material is nearly seven hours. On the other hand, the CivEd assessment is 90 minutes long, so each student receives the complete test. This method, of course, affects the sample sizes required in each country for a nationally representative sample.

While ALL is a household survey (because it focuses on a mainly non-school age population), the other assessments are administered to students within schools. In addition to the cognitive tests and other instruments described in the earlier section, each of the studies also will collect key demographic and education-related information through background questionnaires, which will be used to analyze the factors affecting achievement across countries. Each of the five assessments includes a student/individual questionnaire and, with the exception of ALL, a school questionnaire. Additionally, TIMSS-R, CivEd, and PIRLS include teacher questionnaires, and PIRLS includes parent and country-level questionnaires (see Exhibit I for highlights of each assessment).

**Exhibit I**
**Overview of International Assessments**

| Assessment | Age group | Sample size per country | Background Questionnaire | Testing time | Manager |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TIMSS-R<br>*Domains:*<br>mathematics and science | 13 year-olds | 3,750 students | Student<br>teacher<br>school | nearly 7 hours;<br>90 minutes per student | IEA project implemented by the TIMSS International Study Center at Boston College |
| CivEd<br>*Domains:* cognitive components on civics knowledge and non-cognitive components such as attitudes | 14 year-olds | n/a | Student<br>teacher<br>school | 90 minutes;<br>90 minutes per student | IEA project implemented by the International Coordinating Center at Humboldt University in Berlin |
| PISA<br>*Domains:* reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy, optional components on self-regulated learning and familiarity with technology | 15 year-olds | 4,500 to 10,000 students | student<br>school | nearly 7 hours;<br>2 hours per student | OECD project implemented by a consortium led by the Australian Council for Educational Research |
| PIRLS<br>*Domain:* reading literacy | 9 year-olds | 3,500 students | student<br>teacher<br>school<br>parent<br>country | 4 hours;<br>60 minutes per student | IEA project implemented by a consortium led by International Study Center of Boston College |
| ALL<br>*Domains*: prose and document literacy, numeracy, problem solving, and information and communication technology literacy with development work in practical cognition and teamwork | 16 to 65 years-old | equivalent of 7,000 individuals | Individual | 60 minutes per student | Statistics Canada and U.S. National Center for Education Statistics |

## *Who are the participants?*

All OECD countries are participating in at least one of these major assessment programs, and two-thirds of them are participating in three or more (see Exhibit II). We asked countries to tell us what their rationales were for electing to (or electing not to) participate in multiple assessment activities.

One benefit for participating in multiple assessments, as mentioned by **New Zealand**, is the breadth of domains and age groups covered. Respondents from New Zealand indicated that multiple assessments were needed to cover their national assessment policy framework at all levels. In fact, their national assessment program—the National Education Monitoring Project—is one of the most extensive in OECD countries, covering a wide variety of subjects on a cyclical basis. Similarly, **Australia** and **The Netherlands** noted that comparisons between surveys and domains are another important reason for their participation. **Australia** also pointed out that comparisons between its States and Territories are possible using international assessments whereas such comparisons are more difficult within their educational structure (see the Australian country highlight for more information).

For the Czech Republic, an important goal is to learn how the Czech education system fares in various domains and, lacking a national assessment program, international assessments are a primary source of information on student outcomes and one with the added and important dimension of comparison with other countries. The **Czech Republic** will use the information collected in TIMSS-R, CivEd, PISA, and ALL to inform and shape the future priorities of their education system.

On the other hand, **Ireland** and **Switzerland** indicated that they generally do not participate in multiple assessment because of the financial burden of doing so. Specifically, **Ireland** felt the cost of participating in multiple international assessments was excessive for a relatively small country. **Switzerland** also noted that the burden on participating schools was too great for multiple assessments. **Australia** indicated that the burden on schools also was a concern in their country when considering participation in multiple assessments.

## *How will results be reported?*

Beginning this year, we will see the first of the results from these major international assessment programs. In general, the procedure for preparing and disseminating results follows a similar model: templates for international reports are discussed and approved by countries; data is prepared by the international study center; draft international report tables are made available to countries for review and from which many begin drafting reports tailored to national audiences; and finally, release of international and, often, national reports. The first round of results is generally an overview of achievement results. More in-depth analytical reports often follow this first phase of reporting, which seek explanations for achievement. The timeline for the major assessment programs follows in Exhibit III.

We also asked countries to share with us their plans for disseminating the results of these studies. Of the responding countries, nearly all will prepare national reports for the studies in which they participate—although the timing for such reports was not always specified. **Australia, Czech Republic, Finland, The Netherlands, New Zealand** and the **United Kingdom** will publish specialized national reports for both TIMSS-R and PISA. **Ireland** and **Switzerland** will publish such reports for PISA. **Spain** will not prepare a separate national report, rather they will simply translate the international report into native language.

## Exhibit II
## OECD Countries Participating in International Assessments

| Country | TIMSS-R | CivEd | PISA | PIRLS | ALL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Australia | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Austria | | | √ | √ | |
| Belgium (Fl) | √ | | √ | | √ |
| Belgium (Fr) | | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Canada | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| Czech Republic | √ | √ | √ | | √ |
| Denmark | | | √ | | √ |
| Finland | √ | √ | √ | | √ |
| France | | | √ | √ | √ |
| Germany | | √ | √ | √ | |
| Greece | | √ | √ | √ | |
| Hungary | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| Iceland | | | √ | √ | |
| Ireland | | | √ | | |
| Italy | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Japan | √ | | √ | | |
| Korea | √ | | √ | | √ |
| Luxembourg | | | √ | | √ |
| Mexico | | | √ | | |
| The Netherlands | √ | | √ | √ | √ |
| New Zealand | √ | | √ | √ | |
| Norway | | √ | √ | | √ |
| Poland | | √ | √ | | |
| Portugal | | √ | √ | | √ |
| Spain | | | √ | | √ |
| Sweden | | | √ | √ | √ |
| Switzerland | | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| Turkey | √ | | | | |
| United Kingdom | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| United States | √ | √ | √ | √ | √ |

**Exhibit III**
**Timeline for International Assessments**

| International Assessment Program | Data Collection | Release of First Results |
|---|---|---|
| TIMSS-R | Spring* 1999 | December 2000 |
| CivEd | Fall 1999 | TBD |
| PISA | Spring 2000 | September 2001 |
| PIRLS | 2002 | Early 2003 |
| ALL | 2002 | Early 2003 |

* Refers to Northern Hemisphere seasons.

Some countries also told us about their plans for more in-depth national reports, once the data are made available subsequent to the release of international results. By conducting their own analyses, countries are able to disaggregate data as appropriate or focus on topics of particular interest. For example, **Switzerland** intends to prepare a report comparing the four major language groups. Similarly, **Australia** plans to highlight information technology in schools in their TIMSS-R report and compare the outcomes of indigenous students to other students in their PISA report.

Countries have planned other strategies for dissemination, as well. For instance:

- **Czech Republic** plans to distribute regular newsletters, deliver lectures and press conferences, and publish results in newspapers and the professional press. Together, these strategies are intended to reach all interested audiences.
- In **Finland**, a dissemination strategy similar to that used for the Second International Adult Literacy Survey is planned. Education officials anticipate publishing an initial policy oriented report, as well as thematic articles, academic theses and dissertations, monographs and compilation books. Additionally, a technical report will be disseminated via the Internet.
- Still in the planning stages, **Australia** is considering strategies such as conferences, seminars, Ministerial level press releases, and publishing reports via the Internet.

# *Network Updates*

## *Network A*

Network A's last meeting was held in Echternach, Luxembourg on October 27-29, 1999, and prior to and following that meeting, the Network has engaged in many activities. Primary among these was the drafting, review, and finalization of indicators for *EAG 2000*. Of note, this year's contribution will include, for the first time, examples of how select countries have used international data for national purposes. The Network also continued drafting chapters for a compendium to be presented at the INES General Assembly in 2000.

Network A also undertook several activities related to PISA. The Network drafted and revised a preliminary terms of reference for the second cycle of PISA, analyzed field trial data from PISA's optional components (CCC self-regulated learning and information technology) and proposed final instruments, and convened an expert group to discuss issues of scaling related to PISA. Additionally, work continued on development work for an assessment of problem solving.

Network A will meet again in Wellington, New Zealand on March 8-10, 2000. At this time, Network members will provide input on the revised terms of reference for the second cycle of PISA and draft chapters for *Network A 2000.* Members also will review a proposal for indicators for the next edition of *EAG* and proposals for possible new developmental areas and provide guidance to the Network A Secretariat as to "next steps." In addition, Network members will receive updates on problem solving development work, evaluation of the implementation of PISA, and other projects (e.g., DeSeCo, ALL, and PIRLS), as well as presentations on national reporting plans for PISA. Additionally, plans will be discussed for the General Assembly meeting in September 2000.

## Network B

Network B held their fall plenary meeting in Vouliagmeni, Greece on September 27-29, 1999, and two sub-group meetings were held in conjunction. Twenty-three countries were represented at the plenary meeting.

The sub-group on Continuing Education and Training (CET) reported that:

- The regular annual data collection on CET will be continued in 2000 and will cover participation in job-related training in the recent period.
- A review of the results of the new European Union Labor Force Survey (EU-LFS) module will be undertaken, with the aim of expanding the regular data collection to all training of all adults.
- The Network would develop a standard module on the measurement of CET in household surveys, and work was initiated at a meeting in Neuchâtel in July 1999, where key experts gathered to review national training questionnaires.
- A special pilot data collection in seven countries with large-scale household survey programs will be conducted in 2000. This data collection will cover a wide range of topics on CET, including non-job-related training.

Since the Network meeting, there has been a lengthy exchange of views within the CET sub-group regarding the proposed terms of reference for the development of the CET module.

The sub-group on Transition from Initial Education to Working Life agreed to proceed with a joint meeting with the European Network on Transition, in order to discuss greater harmonization of surveys of school-leavers (e.g., definitions, population coverage, and topics), as well as extension of those surveys to other countries. Although the EU-LFS ad-hoc transition model is of great interest, the sub-group would like to include expertise outside the EU, as well. As a next activity, the sub-group members will be providing data on sample sizes in their countries to shed light on the feasibility of the proposed groupings of early school-leavers.

In addition to the reports from the sub-groups, the plenary meeting in Greece dealt with issues related to next edition of *Education at a Glance*, findings regarding rates of return, and the work on chapters for a compendium to be presented for the INES General Assembly in September 2000.

According to current plans, Network B will begin its next data collection in March 2000. The next Network B meeting will take place in June 2000.

## Network C

Network C last met in Paris, France on September 27-29, 1999. During the months of July to December 1999, Network C's main activities focused on the pre-studies of the Survey of Schools at the Upper Secondary Level and preparation of indicators for *Education at a Glance (EAG) 2000.* The Network also was busy preparing a section titled *The Learning*

*Environment and its Relationship to Outcomes* for a compendium for the General Assembly in 2000.

The primary aim of the Survey of Schools at the Upper Secondary Level is to yield indicators regarding the learning environment and the organization of schools at the upper secondary level. Approximately 20 countries will participate in the survey. Information will be obtained through a written questionnaire that will be completed by school directors. The survey's main data collection will be in 2001, addresses four key issues:

- school policies and practices to enhance transition,
- aspects of school functioning,
- human resource, and
- use of information and communication technology.

In order to define the target population for the survey of upper secondary schools and provide the background information necessary for selecting a sampling strategy, a pre-study has been carried out by Center for Applied Research on Education of the University of Twente (OCTO). In this study, the structure of the upper secondary education system for each of the participating countries will be described, and a comparative framework of system structure will be developed, addressing the following nine classification criteria:

- program orientation (general, non-vocational, vocational),
- education or labor market categorization for program of study,
- cumulative duration (age and grade),
- sequence of national degree and qualification structure (first, second, or upper secondary qualification),
- institution structure (school based or combined school and work based),
- service provider,
- institutional setting (whether specific program or various programs are offered ),
- mode of participation (full-time or part-time program), and
- funding sources.

The comparative framework will serve as a basis for future development of a reduced classification framework. In addition, the draft survey instrument (also developed by OCTO) has been pilot-tested in two Dutch-speaking and two English-speaking countries.

Network C will meet again in Budapest, Hungary on January 24-26, 2000, where the preliminary results of both pre-studies will be discussed. Members also will review the tendering procedure and implementation of the second phase of the survey (sampling procedure, implementation of field test and main study, and data analysis).

## *BPC Update*

The BPC last met in Paris, France on October 4-5, 1999. A main focus of this meeting was a review of the field trial, which occurred from February to April 1999. Other major issues related to the tender for the second cycle of PISA—members reviewed the draft terms of reference and discussed the tendering process, budget, and future scope of PISA. The BPC will next meet in Melbourne, Australia on March 13-15, 2000. At this time, members will review and finalize the terms of reference for the second cycle of PISA and review the initial findings from an evaluation of the implementation of PISA. Members also will have presentations on national plans for reporting and dissemination of PISA results.

# Country Highlight: Australia

*This article was prepared by Wendy Whitham (Australian BPC and Network A member) and colleagues from the Schools Division of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.*

This article presents a broad overview of the education system and educational assessment in Australia. It should be emphasized at the outset that Australia operates under a federal system of education. This means that primary responsibility for schooling rests with the eight State and Territory governments, together with the many education authorities that operate non-government schools. Although it operates no schools, the Commonwealth government (that is, Australia's federal government) has a direct interest in many aspects of schooling, including national goals for schooling and nationally comparable information on the performance of Australian students and schools.

## Overview of the Education System

Australia comprises six States and two Territories, with each State and Territory being responsible for its own school system. Schools may be operated directly by governments or by non-government authorities, with most of the latter having religious affiliations. State and Territory governments have major financial responsibility for government school education. Non government schools are funded by private effort, with substantial support from the Commonwealth.

Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers for education have formed a council, known as the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) which meets once or twice each year, enabling Ministers to work together on areas of common interest. In 1989, the predecessor council to MCEETYA produced the first ever set of common and agreed national goals for schooling in Australia. In April 1999, agreement was reached on a new set of *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*. The new goals focus on improving the educational outcomes of all students, reflecting the right of all young Australians to aspire to success in learning, and to have the knowledge, skills and understanding essential to their effective participation in Australian civic life. The focus on learning outcomes means that progress towards the national goals should be measurable, enabling improved public accountability and reporting on educational outcomes at all levels - school, school system, and national.

Approximately seventy percent of Australian school students are enrolled in government schools, which operate under the direct responsibility of the State or Territory Education Minister. Of the remaining thirty percent, around two-thirds are enrolled in Catholic schools.

School education encompasses the years from kindergarten through to Year 12. In most States and Territories, children start primary school at the age of five, when they enroll in a preparatory or kindergarten year, after which primary education continues for either six or seven calendar years depending on the State or Territory. Junior secondary education covers Years 7 or 8 to 10, while Years 11 and 12 are known as senior secondary education.

Schooling is compulsory from age 6 to 15 in all States and Territories, except Tasmania where the compulsory period extends to 16 years. The senior secondary years (when students are between approximately 17 and 18 years of age)

are not compulsory. Just under three-quarters of Australia's young people currently stay on to Year 12.

The principal post-school destinations for young people are higher education (for which successful Year 12 completion is required), the vocational education and training sector, and employment. There is no nationally common certification at the end of Year 12, but each State and Territory provides a senior secondary certificate. While the systems of certification have much in common across the country, there are differences in the categories of subjects made available to students, the methods of assessment, reporting procedures and types of certificates.

## *Educational Assessment in Australia*

In Australia, the primary responsibility for assessment of student performance lies at the State/Territory and school levels. Thus the education department in each State and Territory, the non-government systems, and many individual schools develop and schedule their own assessments of school students. In particular, each of the States and Territories manages a program of statewide assessment in key areas, for selected levels below senior secondary. The participation of non-government schools in these assessments currently varies across States and subject domains and is expected to increase. Some of the assessment is for the whole age or year cohort, while sample testing may cover other domains. All State programs of assessment include annual assessments of literacy and numeracy for at least Years 3, 5 and 7.

While there is no national testing or assessment system in Australia, there are a number of initiatives at the national level, which have or will result in nationally comparable reporting on student outcomes. These are outlined below.

Of major importance since 1997 has been the development of a process to enable comparable reporting of literacy and numeracy performance across the country, using the States' own assessment programs. The Commonwealth government has been a key player in developing and gaining national agreement on literacy and numeracy 'benchmarks' (which in the Australian context refer to nationally agreed minimum acceptable standards) at Years 3, 5 and 7, and on a process of equating and reporting the results from these various assessments to the Australian community. Policy makers and education officials are eagerly awaiting the first reporting from this process, which should occur early in 2000 when States and Territories will report the performance of their Year 3 students in reading. In subsequent years, the benchmarking and equating process will allow reporting of numeracy and other areas of literacy at Year 3, Year 5, and Year 7 levels.

Also, for a number of years, the Commonwealth government has funded one-time studies aimed at enhancing reporting on student outcomes. These have included studies on the social objectives of schooling and the information technology skills of school students. In addition, the Commonwealth funds the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) program which is a series of longitudinal surveys which began in the 1970s with the aim of monitoring the participation of young people in school, post-school study, and work.

The Commonwealth government also is instrumental in encouraging Australia's participation in international studies, which provide important international comparative information and the potential for comparing performance within Australia.

At present, Australia is involved in PISA, in a range of TIMSS-related work (principally TIMSS-R and the TIMSS-R Video Study), and in the IEA's Civic Education Study. When Australia does participate in these studies, our objective is to have all State and Territory

government systems involved, along with schools from the non-government sector. In most cases, sample sizes are augmented to enable comparisons between States and Territories and for particular student groups.

### *Reporting on the Outcomes of Schooling*

Australian school authorities report developments in school education each year through an Annual National Report on Schooling in Australia (ANR), published by MCEETYA. The ANR is a joint, co-operative effort between the Commonwealth, States, Territories and the non-government school sector. It is not only a vehicle for reporting to the public and the educational community but also the vehicle for educational accountability by States and non-government schools for the tied funding they receive from the Commonwealth.

To date, the report has not contained a great deal of information on student attainment, although it has included data from the national and international studies referred to already. As noted above, the 1999 report will contain the first nationally comparable reporting of performance in reading by Year 3 students. Reporting on attainment in other subject domains will be enhanced in future years following a decision by Ministers (made at the time they agreed to the new set of national goals) that performance measures should be developed in four areas: participation/ retention/completion, vocational education and training in schools, science, and information technology.

A committee of officials currently is working on these domains. It is likely that a range of different types of measures will be developed: some may be derived from existing international studies, while others may involve the development of new instruments. The IT area provides an interesting challenge and a consultancy has already been established to investigate both Australian and international work in this area.

## *Current Assessment Activities*

During the past six months, countries have been very busy with a variety of assessment activities. At the international level, many countries were engaged in cleaning data and preparing it for analysis, as the main study for TIMSS-R and the field trial for PISA concluded last Spring. For those countries participating in the IEA Civic Education Project, data collection for the main study occurred during this period. Data collection also got underway for those countries participating in the TIMSS-R Video Study.

In addition to these activities, several responding countries also described activities related to national assessment:

- In **Ireland**, data analysis and preparation of a report from a national assessment of mathematics achievement in the fourth grade was underway. Additionally, researchers began preparing the *Drumcondra English Profiles*, a tool to be used for assessing students' oral language, reading and writing skills at the primary school level, which was prepared based on teacher judgements about student achievement.
- As part of the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP), assessments in the areas of science, art and information skills were administered in **New Zealand** during the past six months. Additionally, the Ministry released reports from the 1998 NEMP assessment. Finally, the Assessment Resource Banks (ARB) project continued item and web site development, and an evaluation of school-based uses of the ARB was initiated.

Finally, several countries described their activities related to student testing or examination programs:

- Over the past six months, **Spain** collected, cleaned, and analyzed data for their national Primary Education Study. Researchers and education officials also began development of a framework, tests, questionnaires, and sampling plans for the Evaluation of Secondary Education and School's Directive Team Studies.
- Of major importance in the **Czech Republic**, a national center was founded in December for developing and administering the MATURITA examinations (a new leaving exam from secondary school). Guidelines for the MATURITA examinations are to be distributed to schools in March 2000, and first examinations (in Czech language, foreign languages and mathematics) are planned for 2002.
- In **Ireland**, the Ministry released a report examining procedures for entry to post-secondary institutions and suggested eforms to the Leaving Certification examination, taken at the end of secondary school.

This newsletter is published under the auspices of Network A. Network A, which is primarily concerned with indicators of student achievement is one of four working groups that are part of OECD's international Indicators of Education Systems (INES) Project. The newsletter is prepared by Eugene Owen (Network A Chair) and Jay Moskowitz, Maria Stephens, Cassandra Jessee, and Yasmin Shaffi of the American Institutes for Research with contributions from Network members.

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